

“Redeemed – A New Identity”

I read an article once about the movie, *The Matrix* and noticed some interesting similarities to the story of Moses and the Exodus. It pointed out a critical turning point in the film that many people miss. In the movie, Keanu Reeves plays a character named Thomas Anderson who is also a computer hacker called Neo. He is introduced to the idea of the Matrix. The Matrix is an alien, machine controlled, virtual reality. It's an unreal world that keeps the human race in a kind of slavery. Neo is told that he is the one who is going to help the human race escape this bondage, but he's a lot like Moses in that he spends the first half of the movie denying that he is the one. The alien agents that he runs into along the way feed this denial of his destiny by only calling him, "*Mr. Anderson.*" Finally, in the second half of the movie an agent, who is trying to kill him, says: "Goodbye, Mr. Anderson." Neo looks at him and says, "*My name is Neo.*" That moment is the first time in the movie he ever uses the name Neo himself, and that's the turning point. It's when he finally owns up to his true identity that he begins to be the person he had been destined to become.

Of course, *The Matrix* is science fiction, but the importance and the power of a sense of identity is a reality. Psychologists, teachers, and parents have all seen how a sense of identity, the way a person conceives of himself or herself, has a powerful influence on how they experience life and choose to live. That's why the Bible says it is very important to have a good and true sense of identity. So here's the question, *where do you find a true sense of identity that can be a source of strength in life?* Do you get it from your family and your friends? Are you defined by your possessions, your positions, your style preferences the trauma you have suffered or the injustice you have endured? Do you just assume an identity like a con artist? Those are some of the modern and post-modern ways of trying to get a sense of identity. But none of them are very satisfying or strengthening. The Bible comes at the issue of identity from a completely different direction. It says that your real identity is something you get from God.

That's one of the lessons of this story from **Exodus 12**, the story of the Passover. In **verses 1-2** the Lord speaks to Moses and Aaron in Egypt and says, "*This month shall be for you the beginning of months. It shall be the first month of the year for you.*" The month of Passover, (our April) was going to mark a new beginning.

Later in **verse 17**, God says this meal, shared on the night of Passover, was to be a yearly ceremony of remembrance forever. This event would mark a crucial part of the story that gave them their new identity. It's lesson? ***God's people form a new community redeemed by the blood of the lamb. They are no longer who they used to be, they are no longer to live the way they used to live***

The story teaches us three things. First,

I. WE NEED TO REMEMBER WHO WE ARE IN RELATIONSHIP TO GOD.

In **verse 1** the LORD speaks, he is initiating all that is going to happen. He speaks in Egypt because he is not just a local tribal God from Israel. In **verse 2** he sets the calendar for a new nation. He is God.

The reality of God and relationship with God is central to the story of the Exodus. We've already seen how God preserved Moses and prepared Moses, and at a point in time, God called him by name to be the human instrument of God's deliverance to fulfill God's promises. Moses didn't want this mission, but God didn't take "no" for an answer so Moses goes and God delivers. God displayed his power through nine plagues of judgment each of which demonstrates God's power over the various gods of Egypt. The tenth plague or judgment will bring death, and this is what precipitates the night of Passover. After this

Moses leads the chosen people out of Egypt toward the Promised Land. They grumble but God provides for them and guides them gives them the ten commandments and forges them into a nation with a new identity, and in the end, they are ready to enter the Promised Land.

The reason this story it is relevant is because the ripples from this story reach into our world and our lives. Jesus comes from this nation redeemed out of Egypt. Not only that but this epic story of deliverance from judgment, the long testing journey in the wilderness led by God, then the final entry to the Promised Land is a metaphor in the Bible for the journey of our lives. If Jesus is your Savior, you have stepped into *this* story. What's more, you have been drawn into this story because that's what God chose for you before the world began. God wants you to understand that your Bible is telling you your story and He is at the heart of it, working in all of it, bringing redemption.

It is easy isn't it to be so immersed in the mundane routine of this physical world that you lose the ennobling vision of the story of redemption into which we have been called? The God who called Abraham, appeared to

Isaac, wrestled with Jacob, prospered Joseph, spoke to Moses out of the burning bush and delivered Israel from Egypt knows you by name. And He wants his name to live in your heart. If someone were to ask you, "Who are you most deeply? What is your identity?" How much would God play a role in your answer? How central is God and the story of God to your sense of self?

The story of the Exodus tells us we need to remember who are in relationship to God. Then it also tells us...

II. WE NEED TO REMEMBER WHO WE ARE IN THE STORY OF THE LAMB.

In **Exodus 12:3** the Lord says, *Tell all the congregation of Israel that on the tenth day of this month every man shall take a lamb according to their fathers' houses, a lamb for a household.* In the verses that follow he tells them they are to sacrifice the lamb and mark the doorposts of the house with the blood of the lamb and then gather inside in family groups to eat the lamb together. When God sent judgment on his enemies, those who believed God's promises would be saved under the sign of the blood of the sacrifice.

From this point on throughout the history of God's people lambs were sacrificed and offered as burnt offerings to God. *Why?* Bible tells us that it was ultimately to prepare people for the coming of Jesus.

For one thing, these sacrifices taught the seriousness of sin. God was saying, *"Don't take my mercy for granted. I will forgive your sins, but so you won't grow callous toward the seriousness of sin I require that you offer these animals as symbolic sacrificial substitutes, as if my judgment for your sin was falling on them. They will die the death you deserve to die."* God was teaching people in a dramatic way, that sin tears the fabric of God's justice and creates a debt that has to be paid.

Some modern people have a hard time understanding this. But there is no question the Bible teaches it, and Jesus emphasized it. When someone gets out of prison, we often say they have paid their debt to society. In some small way, we recognize that crimes can't always just be forgiven. Suppose someone commits a terrible crime: a woman is raped, a life is taken, a whole community is devastated. What if a judge says, *"Well, he's very sorry for what he did, so let's just let it go at that and let him off"*? Everyone would be outraged. What kind of a judge is that to uphold the laws that hold society together and evil in check? The Bible says there are spiritual laws of life just as we have cultural laws. God's laws are rooted in

his justice and part of the ultimate spiritual reality. They cannot be sidestepped. Our sins create a debt to justice that has to be paid. The debt we owe because of our sins is too big for any of us to pay down much less pay off.

The good news is...

The other thing the sacrifices did was to show us that there could be a way for sins to be forgiven. The sacrifices pictured in dramatic ceremonies what prophets described with vivid word pictures. It all points to Jesus.

Edith Schaeffer was once being questioned by a group of Jewish college students about Jesus. She said, *“Let me read a passage from one of your Jewish prophets, Isaiah and then ask you a question. Remember he lived and wrote seven hundred years before Jesus was born.”* She then read them these words from **Isaiah 53:6-7**, *All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. ⁷ He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter....* She went on through **verse 10** which says: *Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt,* (The guilt offering was a lamb). When she had read those words she asked, *“Who is that referring to?”* One guy said, *“That’s easy; that’s a description of Jesus.”* Then she asked; *“Do you realize what you just said? Remember Isaiah wrote seven hundred years before Jesus.”* She said they were all stunned. Seven hundred years after the prophecy of Isaiah John the Baptist saw Jesus walking toward Him one morning and said, *“Look, the lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world.”* (**John 1:29**).

Maybe you have never struggled with faith and doubt. But if you do, when you do, one thing to remember is the story of the Lamb and the prophecies that were fulfilled by Jesus. If you are a Christian, then your story is part of this story - the story of God and the story of the lamb and that is huge. How much does that story shape your identity?

All of this leads to the third truth, which is this:

III. WE NEED TO REMEMBER WHO WE ARE IN LIGHT OF OUR REDEMPTION.

*Let’s come back to **Exodus 12** and notice five significant truths.*

A. First: Christians are an imperfect people redeemed by a perfect sacrifice.

Exodus 12:5. *Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male a year old.* This perfection had to be proven. **Verse 6** says that the sacrificial lamb had to be watched for four days to ensure there were no defects. There is a moment in the life of Jesus (**John 8**) where Jesus Christ turns to his enemies and says, which of you can point out a single sin in my life? They couldn't. That's why **1 Peter 1:19** says we are redeemed *with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.*

B. Second: Christians people who accept the need for God's grace and place themselves under the blood of the sacrifice.

Verse 7 They had to apply the blood to the doorpost. Later in **verse 22** they were told no one could go outside the door until morning. That's important. The judgment that was coming was a judgment they all deserved. The story brings that out symbolically but powerfully.

You couldn't say, for instance, I'm an Israelite so I can go outside. You couldn't say, I'm a moral person, I try to do the right thing, besides I'm not the oppressor I am the oppressed, the enslaved, so I'm not in danger of the judgment. No! Everyone is under this judgment. Unless they are under the blood, that's the symbolism.

It's fair to say there has to be a definite and intentional decision to accept the need for grace and the way of grace. So the essential question for you is how intentional, how definite, how personal and sincerely have you done that? The whole story of the Bible leads to Jesus as the fulfillment of what all of this pictured and pointed toward. So for us, it isn't a woolly lamb but a crucified Jesus. Are you under the blood of his sacrifice? I'm not going to make that language more culturally comfortable today because it seems to me there is something in this imagery that we shouldn't clean up or water down. When judgment fell on the Egyptians that night the little gatherings of believers inside the houses marked by blood knew that they were safe – but not because they were better than the Egyptians. The only thing that protected them from the judgment of God was the blood of that sacrifice. One day the judgment of God is going to fall on this world just like the ten plagues fell on Egypt. In that day the only thing that delivers you from judgment is Christ's sacrifice applied to your life through faith in Jesus. *Christians are imperfect people redeemed by a perfect sacrifice because they accept their need for grace and place themselves under the blood of that sacrifice.*

C. Third, Christians are people who have been given a sacrifice that unites them as the people of God.

Verse 4 *And if the household is too small for a lamb, then he and his nearest neighbor shall take according to the number of persons; according to what each can eat you shall make your count for the lamb.* There were two purposes for this one was that while there was to be plenty of lamb for everyone who wanted it none of it was to be wasted or treated as common or thrown away. But secondly, it wasn't just an individual thing. It brought people together around the sacrifice and the supper. The reason they were to roast and serve the lamb whole, as it says in **verses 8-10**, is so that they would see that they were all sharing in the one sacrifice. God wants us to see ourselves as part of a community of believers bound together by the grace we need and the grace we share in the one sacrifice of Christ.

D. Fourth, Christians are people who have been given, in the sacrifice that redeems us, a grace that feeds us.

Verses 8-10 *That same night they are to eat the meat roasted over the fire, along. ⁸ They shall eat the flesh that night, roasted on the fire; with unleavened bread and bitter herbs they shall eat it. ⁹ Do not eat any of it raw or boiled in water, but roasted, its head with its legs and its inner parts. ¹⁰ And you shall let none of it remain until the morning; anything that remains until the morning you shall burn.* The sacrifice becomes a supper that strengthens and satisfies.

Do you ever feel weak and then you sit down and eat something nourishing and you feel the strength flow back into you and you're ready to go on? The same thing can happen spiritually. What do you run on? What do you feed on in life? In both the Passover and the Lord's Supper the symbolism is that the same sacrifice that saves you is the meal that feeds you.

We human beings have a tendency to keep trying to satisfy the hungers of our hearts with quick fixes or foolish recipes of our own making. In the end only the love of God revealed in Jesus, sealed and secured by his sacrifice for you, made real to you by the Holy Spirit, known in the spiritual reality of the presence of God with you, and treasured, treasured in inward prayers of gratitude and songs of worship – only those spiritual realities can nourish your soul. *We need to learn that the sacrifice by which we are redeemed is also to be the means by which we are nourished.*

E. Fifth, we are a people who have been given a sacrifice that prepares us for a new life as God's people.

Verse 11 *In this manner you shall eat it: with your belt fastened, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand. And you shall eat it in haste. It is the LORD's Passover.* Cloak tucked into your belt, sandals on your feet, staff in hand, Eat it in haste. What's that mean? It means be ready to step out on a new journey. The sun went down that evening on a ragged race of enslaved people. It rose the next morning and the holy nation of Israel as they began to journey to the Promised Land. In **verse 8** they were told to eat the lamb with unleavened bread because yeast was a symbol of impurity. God was saying *get rid of the impurities, start fresh.* Begin a new life. Step into your new identity.

CONCLUSION

I read a poignant story recently about a woman found semi-conscious outside a church in Carlsbad California. She was in her fifties and called herself "Sam." The story gained widespread media attention. Her identity was discovered when her nephew saw her in a news report and called his mother to tell her he had found aunt Ashley. Her real name isn't Sam or Samantha but Ashley. Her amnesia was caused by a tumor. Some people pointed out that the concept of identity is challenging. Is this woman who she says she is (Sam) or who other people tell her she is (Ashley)? The Bible teaches us that we often suffer from spiritual amnesia, but our core identity is revealed to us by the God who loves us. Believe that.

Every day I forget who I am at least for a little while. I forget I am redeemed by the blood of the lamb. I am a part of the story of God and his redeeming grace. We all forget. We respond to circumstances in ways that suggest we've forgotten who we are! We get shaken by the struggles of life in ways that suggest we've forgotten who we are and to whom we belong. We give into despair or resort to quick fixes that suggest we've forgotten who we are. Sometimes, what's even worse, like Mr. Anderson, we resist accepting who we are. God speaks into our spiritual amnesia and our resistance to his calling and says this is who you are. He gives the ancient paths to remind us. He gave the Israelites the Passover meal, and Jesus gave us the Lord's Supper to remind us. So don't forget: You are no longer the person you used to be, you no longer need to live the way you used to live.

Amen.